

you to contribute to America's economic welfare. But it's about more than economics. A century ago, visionaries here in Flint harnessed the potential of new technology to build the world's largest auto company. Their success gave Americans a mobility and freedom that reshaped the entire economic and physical landscape of our Nation.

Today, at the dawn of the information age, we have the potential to give millions of Americans even greater freedom in cyberspace. As I said, it's about more than economics. You know, when I was driving from my last stop here, there were police along the way at intersections, making sure that no children got in the way of the motorcade or no cars went through the stop sign. One of those police officers was in a wheelchair.

One of my speechwriters has one disabled arm and one prostheses. He writes a heck of a speech. It's nice that he's got a job, but it's more important that the feelings of his heart can be expressed. One of the things I've learned in nearly 30 years in public life and a few years before that, just sort of ambling around the world, is that everybody's got a story; everybody's got dreams; everybody's afraid sometimes and brave sometimes. And in the end, when you strip it all away, there's not a great deal of difference in the relative significance of our stories. If you put all the people in the world end to end, with the person with

the lowest IQ on one end and the highest IQ on the other, you couldn't stick a straw between any two people.

The whole premise of America is that we are inherently, in a fundamental way, equal, though unique. People carry different burdens in life, and everybody, even the most blessed, carry a few. God puts bigger burdens on some than others, but everybody should have the chance to have their story. In the end, in the not completely knowable terrain of the human heart is the real argument for all these efforts.

So I ask you, I'll do everything I can in the time remaining. For the rest of my life I'll be grateful that I happened to be President at this moment of true revolution in human ability. But we have to keep working and never forget the economics is important, but the dreams matter more.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:15 p.m. in the Ballinger Field House. In his remarks, he referred to Karla Hudson, rehabilitation counselor, Michigan Commission for the Blind, who introduced the President; Mayor Woodrow Stanley of Flint; Judy Brewer, director, Web Accessibility Initiative; Pamela Loving, president and chief executive officer, Career Alliance; Michael Zelle, executive director, Disability Network; and Richard Shaink, president, Mott Community College.

## Statement on the Federal Budget Surplus

*September 21, 2000*

Today the Department of the Treasury is announcing that for the first 11 months of this year the surplus stands at a record \$171 billion, more than twice the surplus at this time last year. In total, we are on track to pay off a record \$360 billion of publicly held debt over the last 3 years, including over \$220 billion in this year alone.

This dramatic fiscal progress did not happen by accident. A long-term commitment to tough choices and fiscal discipline, not to short-term political gestures, has helped put America on track to pay down the debt by 2012. The majority in Congress should not jeopardize the longest

economic expansion in history by failing to adopt our long-term strategy to make America debt-free for the first time since 1835.

Let's work together to invest in our future by strengthening Social Security and Medicare, including a voluntary, affordable Medicare prescription drug benefit, making investments in key priorities like education, and putting America on course to be debt-free for the first time since Andrew Jackson was President.

Memorandum on the Interagency Task Force To Examine the Role of  
Medicare and Medicaid Coverage of Assistive Technologies in Encouraging  
the Employment of Persons with Disabilities  
September 21, 2000

*Memorandum for the Attorney General, the  
Secretary of Health and Human Services, the  
Secretary of Education, the Secretary of Labor,  
the Secretary of Veterans Affairs*

*Subject:* Interagency Task Force to Examine the  
Role of Medicare and Medicaid Coverage of  
Assistive Technologies in Encouraging the  
Employment of Persons with Disabilities

The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, the last legislation that I signed during the 20th Century, was a breakthrough in helping persons with disabilities enter the workforce. Persons with disabilities can now return to work and retain their Medicare and Medicaid coverage. No longer will they be forced to make an unfair choice between work and essential health care coverage. The Work Incentives law affirms that persons with disabilities can and do make valuable contributions to society through participation in the American workforce.

In ensuring that persons with disabilities have the same opportunities to work as all Americans, our next step is to take advantage of the remarkable advances in “assistive technologies”—the innovative devices that facilitate independent living and meaningful employment for persons with disabilities. This year I have included \$100 million in my budget, an increase of \$14 million over FY 2000, for disability and technology research, including assistive technology research, at the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. I have also included in my budget this year \$41 million for State-based assistive technology programs through the Department of Education. The National Center for Medical Rehabilitation Research, which is overseen by the National Institutes of Health, and the Department of Veterans Affairs, each provide \$30 million in grants for assistive technology research. Together, these funds will support comprehensive research and education on the use of assistive technologies to further integrate persons with disabilities into their community and the workforce.

While the Work Incentives law extended Medicare and Medicaid to workers with disabilities, the Federal Government must make a comprehensive effort to determine how best to make these programs more effective for persons with disabilities, including improved coverage of assistive technologies. It is especially important to examine how medically necessary assistive technologies may facilitate independent living and also support employment for persons with disabilities.

I hereby direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to convene an interagency Task Force on Health Care Coverage of Assistive Technologies that includes the Departments of Health and Human Services, Justice, Education, Labor, Veterans Affairs, and other agencies, as appropriate. The Task Force shall study the role that Medicare and Medicaid does and should play in the coverage of assistive technology devices. The work of the Task Force is intended to provide a framework for future Medicare and Medicaid coverage decisions that complements my Administration’s overall efforts to promote employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

I direct the Task Force to conduct a study on the role of Medicare and Medicaid in covering assistive technologies that encourage employment of individuals with disabilities. The study should:

- (a) examine current Medicare and Medicaid coverage of assistive technology devices and the cost of providing such coverage. Assess the current coverage criteria under Medicare and Medicaid with comparisons to the private insurance market. Review and evaluate other past and on-going research on Medicare and Medicaid coverage of assistive technologies;
- (b) seek input from the disability community to identify the types of medically necessary assistive technologies that facilitate independent living and employment. Develop criteria for identifying such devices;
- (c) determine whether provision of assistive technologies may substitute for other